

Designing and launching bilingual community-based non-formal education and extension initiatives in the Cambodian Highlands¹

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Abstract

The paper describes key elements to be considered when designing and launching community-level education initiatives using the vernacular with the national language. Successful strategies will be drawn from the experience of various non-formal education (NFE), community extension, action research, and local human resource development initiatives in the Cambodian Highlands.

Prior to the launching of the NFE projects described, fewer than 20 percent of the males and less than 2 percent of females were literate, and all education and extension materials were in the national language which the majority of the villagers could not understand.

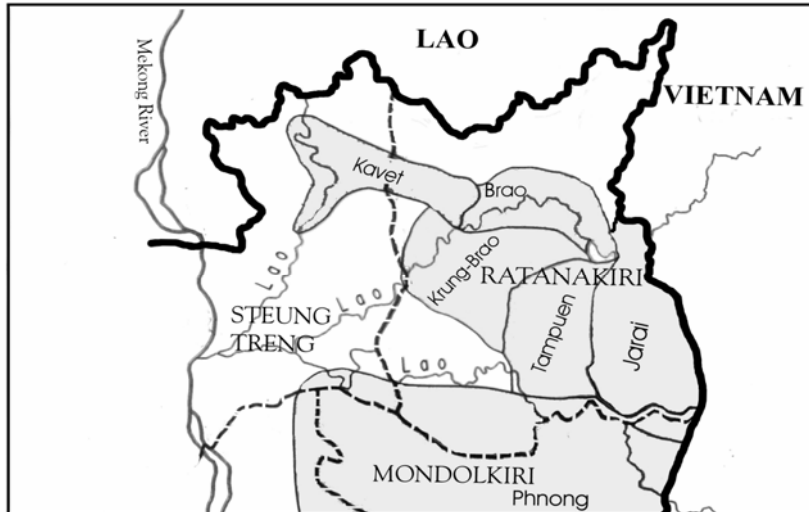
Successful strategies developed by two NGOs, International Cooperation for Cambodia (ICC) and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), include training local villagers to teach in their own communities, organizing community-based classes, designing curricula appropriate for the communities, and facilitating close cooperation with the National NFE Department.

The result has been sustainable programmes with strong community ownership. Vernacular languages are used not only in literacy, but also in community extension which includes land use planning, natural resource management and community health. One highly successful avenue for developing local human resources piloted by NTFP has been an extra-curricular project which trains ethnic minority youth attending the government secondary schools to conduct village-level action research and extension using the vernacular languages. Oral history and cultural resources are being recorded, community extension materials are being produced based on needs identified together with the villagers and materials are being printed in both the vernacular and the national languages. Literate youth partner with illiterate village elders and other community members to conduct community extension and consultation projects. The youth are responsible for the multi-lingual documentation efforts, and their subsequent dissemination through desktop publishing.

Introduction

The northeast highlands of Cambodia have been isolated from development for generations. The indigenous highland peoples who have long inhabited the area live in a state of dynamic dependence on the land and its natural resources. This is especially true of Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri (literally, "mountains of jewels") Provinces where subsistence-based indigenous communities make up the majority of the local population. These highland provinces have only recently had year round road access to the rest of the country, and many of the villages still remain accessible only by foot or canoe. The provinces are still relatively rich in natural resources including valuable primary hardwood forests, semi-precious stones and rich volcanic soil. National borders with both Vietnam and Laos make the region important for trans-boundary biodiversity conservation (Thomas 2002, WWF 2000). As illustrated in the map below, Ratanakiri Province, the focus of this article, is home to a number of indigenous groups, including the Brao, Krung, Tampuan, and Jarai.

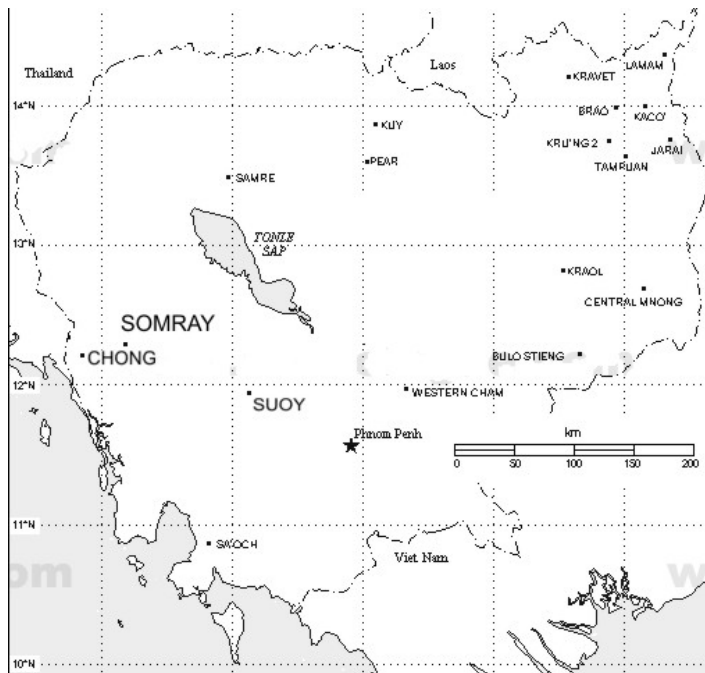
¹ ©Anne Thomas, 2003



Source. Colm, 1997

Figure 1. Ethnic Minorities of Northeastern Cambodia

This paper focuses on the approximately 100,000 indigenous people who live primarily in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces, where they make up the majority of the population. There are also pockets of indigenous minority peoples scattered throughout the country for whom the Ratanakiri pilots may be relevant (See map, below).



Source. Blench, 2002

Figure 2. Approximate locations of Cambodian minorities

The indigenous people in these highlands provinces have been multilingual to various degrees through traditional language contact among neighboring Brao, Krung, Tampuan, and Jarai communities (Thomas: 2002). However, the vast majority can neither speak nor understand Khmer, the national language, largely because of the geographical isolation which continued until the last decade. This is especially true for women and children who still have little contact outside their home communities.

Until recently, education services were provided primarily to provincial and district towns. Few ethnic minority children had access to formal schooling, and only a very small number have reached high school. (Thomas 2002).

From an educational point of view, specialised services need to be designed specific to the needs of the highland communities (Escott 2000). Bilingual education appears to be an effective strategy for enabling indigenous communities to access educational services and socio-economic development. This paper describes two bilingual education pilot projects in Ratanakiri province that use community-based approaches to address the educational and development needs of children, youth and adults in ethnic minority communities in the highlands.

For the purpose of this paper, the terms 'highlanders', 'ethnic minorities', or 'indigenous minorities' are used interchangeably and refer to the people groups of the northeastern Cambodian highlands bordering southern Laos and the central highlands of Vietnam.

Challenges and opportunities relating to EFA in the highlands.

In 1990, the *World Declaration on Education for All* adopted at the Jomtien Conference (Thailand, 5-9 March 1990) reaffirmed every person's right to learn and the commitment to meet the basic learning needs of all people by expanding learning opportunities and working for a fully literate society. "Education for All by the Year 2000" was launched at this landmark conference. At the end of the decade, it was clear that indeed, some progress had been made to achieving that goal in Southeast Asia (UNESCO, 2000a). However, in some countries the gap had increased between the mainstream populations and the pockets of marginalised communities which had difficulty accessing educational services, even when services were expanded and accelerated nationwide (UNESCO, 2000a; 2000b). This was the case in the ethnic minority regions of Cambodia. Both the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on EFA 2000 Assessment (Bangkok, Thailand, January 17-20 2000) and the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal (26-28 April 2000) re-emphasised the need to invest more effort, resources, and imagination in adult education and literacy (MOEYS, 2000; UNESCO, 2000a, 2000b).

Marginalisation of ethnic minority people

Ratanakiri province remained in relative isolation until the UN brokered peace process in the early 1990s and the democratization that followed the 1993 elections. Ironically, democratization in Cambodia has resulted in the further marginalisation of indigenous people, both from current political processes and from access to education. Whereas during the socialist era (1979-1991), education for indigenous people was promoted and representatives of local ethnic groups held government positions at district and provincial levels. Selection for government positions now requires language proficiency in Khmer (the official national language) and a certain level of formal education. Indigenous people's lack of access to education and their low proficiency in Khmer combine to give them very limited access to district or provincial government posts or to political processes at the national level (Paterson: 2002b). In addition, few of the highlanders meet the basic literacy qualifications necessary to attend various training courses for work in primary health, agriculture, etc. (Thomas, 2002).

The national *Education for All* report places the overall literacy rate for Cambodia at 68%, with 51% for females (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2000; MOEYS, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; NFED & ICC, 2000). A recent national literacy assessment (supported by UNDP, UNESCO Cambodia, and UNESCO PROAP) conducted on a random sample of Cambodians from all provinces confirms that the national literacy level is still significantly low.

Illiteracy is still almost total among the highland minorities, especially among females. As illustrated below in Table 1, a survey of 80 highland respondents found only 5 percent of the males literate and 76 percent were completely illiterate. All of the females in the sample failed the literacy test. As noted above, most children have no access to education. Those who do get into school often cannot afford to study beyond grade 2 or 3 due to the expense (often related to corruption in the system) and lack of priority given to indigenous students. Instruction is in Khmer in spite of the fact that most women and

children cannot understand that language and the majority of the men have only limited Khmer language skills (Thomas 2002). Out of a total indigenous population of 65,000 in the Ratanakiri provincial capital, only 20 students are currently attending the one secondary school (Paterson 2002b).

Table 1. Ethnic affiliation and literacy

ETHNIC AFFILIATION	Rates (%)					
	Male			Female		
	Illiterate	Semi-Literate	Literate	Illiterate	Semi-literate	Literate
Khmer	23.2	28.0	48.8	44.1	26.0	29.0
Highland Minorities	76.3	18.4	5.3	85.7	14.3	0.0
Others	53.8	23.1	23.1	65.0	19.4	15.0

Source: MoEYS 2000, 41

Bilingual education endorsement

Because most minority people lack basic Khmer language skills, language of instruction is widely recognized as the most significant barrier to their ability to access mainstream education in the NFE and formal systems. Various prominent government officials, including the Prime Minister, have endorsed bilingual education as an important strategy to overcome this barrier (NEP 2002) as well as a basic human right guaranteed in the constitution.² Despite this support, bilingual education interventions are still limited to the NGO-supported pilot programmes described in this article.

Prime Minister Hun Sen endorsed bilingual education in his address on the occasion of the National Education Forum’s review of the Education Sector Support Program (ESSP) for 2002-2006. He specifically noted the needs of the indigenous populations in the two highland provinces:

The overall enrolment and admission rates in Ratanakiri and Monduliri remain too low... This induces us to review and develop specific and viable strategies to address the unique access constraints in ethnic minority areas, such as the development of bilingual curricula and programs where Khmer is used as a core language, the provision of scholarships and the training of ethnic minority teachers (Samdech Hun Sen 2002).

In the conclusion of his address, the Prime Minister underscored the important role of education for rural development in Cambodia:

In short, the Royal Government of Cambodia considers education as an important pillar of the poverty reduction strategy... Specifically, the equitable access to basic education for every (sic) children and adults is an effective mean to insert peace, freedom and democracy to people and help them to become educated and skillful for earning their living as well as contribute to the defending, building, and developing our nation (ibid).

Goal #2 of the national EFA plan is to “ensure that by the year 2015 all children, especially young girls, children in difficult circumstances and children from ethnic minorities, have access to and complete good quality, free primary education.” In his address at the Seminar on Bilingual Education (Ratanakiri, 2002), H.E. Nach Bounreong representing the EFA Secretariate of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, stated that “The preparation and development of bilingual classes for minority ethnic groups is strategically important to ensure that by the year 2015, all children will receive good quality education” (Nach, 2002).

² See Annex 1 for an overview of relevant conventions to which Cambodia is signatory.

Education rights are guaranteed in the Cambodian Constitution in article 58: “ *The state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools. Citizens shall receive education for at least 9 years*” (ibid, p.2). The rights of ethnic minorities to use their own language for instruction are further affirmed by H.E. Pen Darith, Advisor to the Council of Ministers:

Persons belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities have the right to use their own language. The policies must reflect these rights by assuring that the value of educational efforts by the ethnic groups themselves be recognised and that these efforts be integrated in to the larger framework of development of a Cambodian national education system that is appropriate for a multicultural society. Educational policy should stress the importance of tolerance for ethnic diversity as an important part of national reconciliation and the effort to build.... Cambodia for the twenty-first century (Pen Darith, 2002).

Article 2 of the United Nations Declaration on Minority Rights (adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992) affirms that ethnic minorities’ “ have the right to enjoy their own culture... and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.” Cambodia has acceded to a number of international human rights conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Discrimination Against Women. The government has thus obligated itself to ensure that all people, including ethnic minority peoples, living in Cambodian territory are afforded the rights declared in each convention (Phuong, 2002). The government has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Articles 28 and 30 state that children have a right to education and that children belonging to minority groups have the right to use their own language.

Bridging the education gap for minority peoples

The Cambodian government has committed itself to “Education for All” by the year 2015, and government efforts have improved literacy rates for Khmer-speaking Cambodians in the lowland provinces through both formal and non-formal education programmes. However, as noted above, many obstacles, including geographic isolation and language differences, have prevented the extension of education services in the highland provinces. However, the linguistic barrier is foremost, as most of the ethnic minorities do not speak Khmer, the language used in all government text books and instructional materials. Thus the indigenous peoples living in the Cambodian highlands have felt little impact from the nationwide “Education for All” initiatives.

These challenges have motivated many indigenous communities to make basic education a priority and to participate in new approaches meant in order to meet the need for basic education for both children and adults.

Community-based bilingual education

Community-based bilingual education programmes supported by three NGOs appear to be a successful means for providing education services to children and adults in the indigenous communities of Ratanakiri Province. In these programmes, instruction begins in the mother tongue and progresses to the national Khmer language so that new literates can read both languages. The community-based approach encourages strong community participation. Communities construct their school buildings out of local materials and mother tongue speakers from the communities volunteer their time as teachers in exchange for assistance from their students during rice planting and harvest. Community organizations in the form of school boards, village development committees or teachers’ associations oversee the running of their schools and mobilise communities to support their programme. Teams of indigenous people develop bilingual curriculum in the local and national languages specific to the needs of the communities.

The rationale for the bilingual model is based on the pedagogical principle of starting with the known and going to the unknown. In the Ratanakiri bilingual programmes, students start reading in their mother tongue, which is written using a Khmer script, and progressively learn to read the Khmer

language. UNICEF's publication, the *State of the World's Children*, notes that there is "ample research showing that students are quicker to learn to read and acquire other academic skills when first taught in their mother tongue. They also learn a second language more quickly than those initially taught to read in an unfamiliar language" (UNICEF 1999).

Further, as noted in UNICEF's EFA working papers, "There is much research which shows that students learn to read more quickly when taught in their mother tongue. Second, students who have learned to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than do those who are first taught to read in a second language. Third, in terms of academic learning skills as well, students taught to read in their mother tongue acquire such skills more quickly" (Mehrotra 1998). Research shows that we learn to read by reading. In the process of learning to read, meaning is essential as we must make sense of the written page. Thus it is naturally easier to learn to read in a language that we understand (i.e. our mother tongue or the first language). Once we can read in one language, we can read in general and transfer that skill to other languages (Smith: 1994; Krashen 2000; Baker 1996)

The World Bank discussion paper for East Asia and the Pacific Region makes the following statement regarding the use of first and second languages in primary education:

The most important conclusion from the research and experience reviewed...is that when learning is the goal, including that of learning a second language, the child's first language (i.e. his or her mother tongue) should be used as the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling...the first language is essential for the initial teaching of reading, and for comprehension of subject matter. It is the necessary foundation for the cognitive development upon which acquisition of the second language is based (Dutcher and Tucker 1996).

Bilingual education and health extension

Many of the common diseases faced by indigenous people in the highlands can be prevented or readily treated. However due to lack of basic health knowledge at the community level, these diseases are often fatal. The under-5 mortality rate in highland areas is twice that of lowland Cambodia. Common diseases are malaria, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites and acute respiratory disease. While the health system in Cambodia has undergone tremendous reform in the past decade, access to health care and quality of services remains a major issue. Although every district of Ratanakiri province has its own health centre, services are inadequate and ethnic minority families often cannot access the services due to geographical distance and lack of transportation. Thus community health is an important component of any educational programme.

Extension services conducted in the national language are not successful in reaching the villagers. Much of the prevention and treatment of basic diseases can be done at home if the family members understand the basic community health messages. Women especially are closely involved with the well-being of their children. Thus health and hygiene lessons in the mother tongue are important components of the bilingual education programmes.

Bilingual education and community development

The rapid transition in the past decade to a market economy has had far reaching consequences for the highland peoples. Traditionally, indigenous people have depended on communal use of natural resources for their livelihood and subsistence. Now commercial interests and the increased market activity has led settlers from lowland provinces to obtain land rights from indigenous groups for cash crop cultivation and land speculation. More and more, outside commercial interests exploit natural resources privately at the cost of the indigenous people. The pursuit of logging concessions, industrial plantations, and hydroelectric projects by outside interests, both legal and illegal, has occasioned major pressure on these traditional lands.

In August, 2002, the national Land Law was approved by the National Assembly and the Senate and signed by the King. This Land Law includes a special section consisting of six articles, protecting the

rights of indigenous peoples in accessing their traditional land, entitled the “immovable properties of indigenous ethnic minorities”. The traditional livelihood of the indigenous peoples is linked to their forests. However, the companies and the government continue to cut in areas where the villagers collect food, fruit, medicinal herbs, rattan, resin, or other forest products. Even though the forest concession allows for community forest areas, the community forestry sub-decree has not yet been passed, leaving the community forest areas in legal limbo. An estimated 2.4 million hectares of concession logging areas are located in the four northeastern provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Kracheh, and Steung Treng, where the majority of the indigenous highland population lives (ibid, p.3). H.E. Pen Darith, Advisor to the Council of Ministers of Cambodia, affirms the important relationship of the indigenous minorities to the forests by stating, “If the culture and livelihood of the highland people is to be preserved and if the forests in the northeast of Cambodia are also to be managed in a sustainable way, a comprehensive national policyas well as implementation mechanism is needed.” (Pen Darith, 2002)

Thus community forestry, land use mapping, and legal literacy are important components of community development and education programmes. Previously illiterate villagers are learning how to map and record the boundaries of their community forests using GIS (Geographic Information Service) and GPS (Global Positioning System) and document the non-timber forest products on which their livelihood depends, in order to record their traditional forest areas with the relevant government departments.

In addition to these efforts, various government and non-government programs have been established to promote community development and literacy since the mid-1990s. Although community development and extension programmes have been established in many of the villages in the province, these have been staffed mostly by Khmer speakers who have the required education and training. Because most of the extension workers are Khmer speakers, a major barrier to the success of the extension efforts has been the extension workers’ inability to communicate with villagers who do not speak Khmer. Government and NGO efforts to train village volunteers as teachers, village health workers, veterinarians, mid-wives and agriculturalists have been hampered because few of the highlanders meet the basic literacy qualifications to attend training courses.

As a result of the various bilingual initiatives, recent extension efforts staffed by bilingual indigenous people have been successful in facilitating community development efforts. The bilingual education programmes have also motivated indigenous people of all ages to gain literacy skills so they can attend training courses in preparation for community development posts with both government and non-government agencies.

The bilingual education programmes in Ratanakiri province described in the latter part of this article enable indigenous peoples to gain both vernacular and Khmer literacy skills while providing them with a tool for preserving indigenous knowledge through the written form of their vernacular. The NFE programmes were specifically designed to compliment the various community-based socio-economic development initiatives supported by a variety of organisations in the province. These include action research, cultural and livelihood studies, community development, community forestry and traditional land tenure (see McAndrew 2001; Colm 1997; Paterson 1997; Paterson 1998).

Case studies of two bilingual education initiatives

Several NGOs working in Ratanakiri Province have established bilingual education and extension programmes that provide indigenous communities with access to education and to necessary health and community development interventions. The NGOs include ICC (International Cooperation for Cambodia), NTFP (Non-timber Forest Products) and CARE Cambodia. Each of the approaches is bilingual, using both indigenous and national languages, and community-based.³ The focus of this article is on ICC and NTFP programmes, specifically the non-formal education and pilot bilingual

³ Please see Annex 2 for an overview of the various initiatives using the local languages.

NFE programmes first established in 1997. Both of ICC and NTFP have separate NFE activities as well as the integrated community development/extension effort.

Case Study I: Bilingual NFE for adults and youth

The ICC NFE programme was the first bilingual education programme in the country. It was initiated in the late 1990s as part of a larger ICC community development programme—the Ratanakiri Integrated Development and Education Project (RIDE). The programme was implemented in close cooperation with the National NFE Department of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' (MoEYS) whose strong endorsement has been key to its success.⁴

The bilingual programme aims to provide the indigenous communities access to education, as well as to facilitate preservation of their cultures. The communities participating are the Mon-Khmer ethnic groups of Tampuan, and Brao (including the Krung and Kavet subgroups), living near the Lao-Cambodian border. Their languages are only distantly related to Khmer, the national language. Most of the students are between the ages of 14 and 35.

The bilingual education project was preceded by extensive linguistic analysis and technical assistance in script development facilitated by consultants from ICC, SIL International, and other non-governmental organizations who specialize in developing orthographies and bilingual literacy programmes.⁵ Currently materials are being developed in four languages, with oversight for the script finalisation overseen by a committee appointed by the MoEYS.

Community ownership. As noted earlier in this paper, the approach encourages community ownership. Communities select community members to serve as their volunteer teachers. They build their own school building out of local materials, with the lighting system supplied by ICC. Classes are held at night after the teachers and students are finished with agricultural work. The students in many of the villages make a contract to support the teacher by assisting in their rice fields four times a year, during field preparation, planting, weeding, and harvest (Thomas 2002).

Curriculum development. Indigenous language committees in four language groups oversee curriculum development for their classes.. The bilingual NFE curriculum includes lessons on natural resource management, primary health care, upland agriculture, numeracy, and community development (Thomas, 2002). Marketing and numeracy is an especially popular topic with communities who are eager to learn how to negotiate fair prices for their agricultural products.

A constant challenge is the need to develop materials for the new literates in languages that have never before been written. Writers' workshops train new literates and teachers to record folk stories from village elders and thus contribute to the body of literature

Volunteer teachers. Volunteer teachers are trained by project staff to provide instruction in their home communities using their own language. They are selected by their communities from the handful of semi-literate men in a given village. These teachers, while often the most educated people in their villages, are usually only semi-literate themselves, having gained literacy skills through their years as police or military. Training workshops and on-site monitoring enable them to teach in their own communities.

Impact at national level. The ICC pilot bilingual education project is the first full-fledged bilingual programme in the country and thus has been instrumental in influencing national policy formulation for bilingual education. The national EFA plan considers the ICC bilingual strategy as an approach to

⁴ Concurrent with the pilot ICC programme, the Ratanakiri Provincial Education office and several other NGOs in the province are supporting Khmer language NFE.

⁵ For further linguistic descriptions of the indigenous languages, see Crowley (2002), Keller (2001), and Gregerson, Keller, and Jordi (1999).

improving educational opportunities for minorities. The model has been influential in stimulating discussion and attention to the issue of bilingual education at the highest levels of MoEYS.

In late July, 2002, ICC hosted the “Seminar on Bilingual Education” in Ratanakiri. This seminar brought together community members, provincial departments, EFA secretariat officials and various departments of both the MoEYS (NFE, Primary Education, Planning) and the Ministry of Rural Development to discuss bilingual education. It also provided an opportunity to present the results of the pilot bilingual NFE programme to a number of MoEYS departments. The Secretary of State for Education was present at the event and gave his endorsement to bilingual education. This was a milestone in the history of bilingual education in Cambodia.

Results in the indigenous communities. ICC supports bilingual NFE classes in the RIDE target sites and also provides technical assistance to other NGOs working in bilingual education in indigenous communities. The programme has trained over 100 bilingual teachers and is providing technical assistance to 52 bilingual NFE classes with approximately 1,224 students enrolled in the 2002 cycle.⁶

At the end of the 2001 cycle, a total of 370 Krung and Tampuan students—108 of them young women—had completed the basic literacy course and were continuing with post-literacy classes. As noted above, only an estimated two percent of women in the province were literate before the NFE intervention began in the late 1990s. This is the first generation of highland women in Ratanakiri to gain literacy skills in both their indigenous and national languages.⁷

Case Study II: Indigenous languages used in integrated community development, natural resource management, and action research

Non-timber Forest Products (NTFP) is a local non-government organization which promotes natural resources management by local communities and provides training to strengthen community based-organisations. NTFP supports bilingual NFE and indigenous curriculum development with technical assistance from ICC. Their experience has shown that local language literacy is an important tool for helping indigenous communities establish effective community development and extension programmes, while reinforcing their cultural identity. The NTFP bilingual literacy programme provides access to basic education for indigenous communities, especially those who cannot speak the Khmer language, many of whom are women.

Currently four Kavet villages are conducting bilingual community based classes in their remote sites in the Virachey National Park buffer zone. Volunteer teachers are supported by their communities while classroom materials and teacher training is provided by NTFP. The teachers have formed local teachers’ organizations in order to oversee the classes. Extension work in community health, agriculture, and natural resource management is closely linked to the NFE efforts.⁸

Community development and extension. NTFP uses indigenous languages as a key tool for involving community members in development, training, and extension. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and action research using local languages have helped to generate community ownership and participation in various development activities including health, agriculture, and natural resource

⁶ These statistics include not only the ICC target sites, but teachers and students from the cooperating NGOs for whom ICC provides technical support in teacher training and curriculum development, including the NTFP bilingual NFE programme described later in this article.

⁷ For further details of the background, challenges, lessons learnt, and impact of the ICC Bilingual NFE programme, please see the SEAMEO journal article by the same author entitled “Bilingual Community-based Education in the Cambodian Highlands: a Successful Approach for Enabling Access to Education by Indigenous Peoples” (Thomas 2002).

⁸ For further discussion of the development of the NFE programme and the linkages with the community development aspects, please see the article by the same author in the Southeast Asian Journal of Education (Thomas, 2002).

management. Khmer and indigenous staff work as a team to do the research and documentation. Indigenous staff members receive training in vernacular literacy skills so that they can produce and maintain records and community plans in both the local and national languages. These include community development plans, agriculture and health extension messages and community forestry regulations that use the local language in oral form and increasingly in written form. Topics covered in community surveys include i) village history, culture and traditions; ii) forest products which are important for livelihood; iii) agriculture crops and rice varieties; and iv) seasonal calendar of diseases affecting the community (Paterson, 2002).

Indigenous Youth Development Programme (IYDP). The Indigenous Youth Development Programme (IYDP) was launched in 2000 through NTFP to address the needs of ethnic minority youth in the formal education system. Very few of the minority youth have access the formal school system—at the time the programme was initiated, only 20 indigenous youth were attending secondary school out of a population of 66,000 indigenous persons province-wide and until 2003, no ethnic minority youths had graduated from provincial secondary schools. Participants are youth currently attending lower or upper secondary school. IYDP activities are held on weekends and during school holidays and focus on community development and cultural documentation in ethnic minority communities.

The programme encourages indigenous youth to stay in school by demonstrating the value of education for their own vocational needs, as well as giving them on-the-job training in community and cultural issues relevant to their communities. In short, it bridges the gap between the formal Khmer system and their traditional community life. The project trains the youth in community development skills as a form of vocational training, which will enable them to take up posts in government and non-government development work after they leave school.

IYDP uses a non-formal approach and extra-curricular activities to provide the on-the-job skills training. The participants use their own indigenous languages to conduct action research in their communities. Documentation of indigenous knowledge and presentations to the communities use the local as well as Khmer languages.

IYDP aims to:

- Increase the interest of both elders and youth in the value and usefulness of education;
- Build human resources such that ethnic minorities have the practical vocational skills training necessary to take up government or NGO community development posts, while having an orientation conducive to empowering (rather than mainstreaming) their own communities;
- Empower community elders through the documentation of their indigenous knowledge by their own educated indigenous youth while increasing the understanding of youth in the value of their indigenous knowledge and culture;
- Add to the pool of educational materials for local libraries, literacy and community development efforts, and village learning centres through documenting indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions in both the local and Khmer languages; and
- Conduct community education and extension in local languages using role plays and videos (especially concerning health and natural resource management).

Twenty five youth were trained during the 2002 school vacation to read and write in Kreung and Tampuan languages, enabling community documentation in Khmer as well as the local languages. Results of these studies are reviewed by the village members and copies kept at the village as part of their village documentation. Communities can hear and understand the results of research in their own language for the first time. Documenting the plants, animals and crops in the local and Khmer languages leads naturally into discussions with the community about how to protect and manage these resources for sustainable development (ibid: 2002).

Action research, documentation of indigenous knowledge, and resulting developments. Elders recognise the value of education for the younger generation and of recording their village history and culture. The indigenous youth, in turn, are impressed with the value of local cultural knowledge. Action research is thus an effective way to bridge the gap between the aspirations of the older and younger generations, enabling them to work together to find appropriate ways of developing their communities while maintaining their cultural identity.

Bilingual documentation by IYDP students in vernacular and national languages uses a variety of forms including i) audio recordings of songs and legends; ii) study of traditional music forms; iii) photographic records; iv) role plays/videos on health and natural resource management. The latter are performed in villages by mobile youth drama teams as well as recorded on video, resulting in the first video productions in the local languages. Role plays are designed around issues identified as highly important to the communities and have proven highly popular when presented to the communities in the local languages. Health topics include prevention of malaria and cholera; natural resource topics include the need for community solidarity to resist outsiders paying villagers to be involved in animal poaching and unsustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products (ibid: 2002).

The National NFE Department and Under Secretary of State for the MoEYS have lauded the research and documentation efforts of the IYDP programme. In January 2002 the NFE Department brought a video team to document the accomplishments of the IYDP programme for showing on national television. Outstanding examples of student's research work for cultural documentation were taken for printing in order to share the action research model with other students in the country.

Highlanders' Association Research/Consultation Project. The IYDP students assisted in a special 18-month consultation process (Dec 2001-April 2003) led by the Highlanders' Association with key ethnic minority communities in Ratanakiri,. The consultation focused on the community members' aspirations, needs, and priorities, the challenges they face in a changing society and the impact of socio-economic development. The role of the youth was to provide documentation skills and translation during the consultative workshops and through compilation of a final report. During the summer of 2003, a number of youth were trained in desktop publishing to prepare the consultation report, and are currently passing the skills on to others. A number of sections are in vernacular languages (Tampuan, Krung) as well as Khmer and English. In addition to advocacy and awareness-raising, the consultation and documentation affirms ethnic communities' self-determination and right to choose their own development options for the future. Priority concerns raised by the highlanders included loss of land, forest and natural resources and the need to access health and education government services (especially education for future generations), and loss of culture.

NTFP has found that there are two opposing views about socio-economic development for indigenous people. One view is that indigenous people must change to become like the majority lowland people in order to progress. The other sees preservation of all aspects of indigenous people's culture with no change—like a living museum. Both of these are extreme views and result in conflict, while NTFP's experience with indigenous highland communities has shown that a "middle road" is needed. Both elders and youth want progress and development; however, they also know it is important to maintain their cultural identity and especially their language. Thus they view literacy in the local language as an important tool to reach this goal.

Elders, youth and women must have the opportunity to reflect on the aspects of their culture which they are proud of and want to keep. They also need the opportunity to consider what innovations or changes from other cultures they could adopt to make their lives easier.. It is a challenge for communities to choose what to accept from outside and what to reject, while considering whether these changes will adversely affect their community solidarity and cultural identity. NTFP's experience has shown that basic literacy and documentation of cultures, using local languages, are important tools that help to build the capacity of local people to face this challenge. The basic education and cultural documentation in their own language is a foundation that enables them to

reflect on and choose the direction of change for the future development of their communities (Paterson 2002)

Conclusion

Ethnic minorities in the Cambodian Highlands need basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to improve their own livelihood as well as to access opportunities for further development training. Community extension and development efforts are most effective when using the local as well as national languages. Oral and written skills are needed in the national language in order to communicate with the majority culture and participate in government training programmes and civil society. Using the vernacular as a basis for education not only provides a bridge to learning the national language, it also helps to strengthen the learners' cultural heritage and identity. Equipping IYDP youth to conduct action research and put information about their communities and cultures into written form helps them to learn about their own cultures while providing a valuable service to their communities.

Bilingual non-formal education (NFE) has helped to bring education services to indigenous communities in Cambodia's Ratanakiri Province. Projects are undertaken in close cooperation with the relevant MoEYS Departments so that lessons learnt through program implementation feed into national policy. The MoEYS recognises the importance of the bilingual pilot projects and supports the expansion of linguistic research, bilingual curriculum development and bilingual classes to meet the needs of the various ethnic minority groups in both formal and non-formal education sectors. The pilot bilingual primary education program initiated as part of the formal system is currently testing models that could be used for bilingual education in other ethnic minority communities in Cambodia. In his speech at the Seminar on Bilingual Education entitled "EFA: Special Strategies for Ethnic Minorities", the Secretary of State for MoEYS stated his appreciation for the way the NGOs in Ratanakiri have been actively engaged with the MoEYS in research and evaluation of bilingual literacy programs, and that learning lessons from these bilingual classes, both for in-school and out-of-school groups, is important in helping the MoEYS formulate its language policy for the future (Im Sethy 2002)

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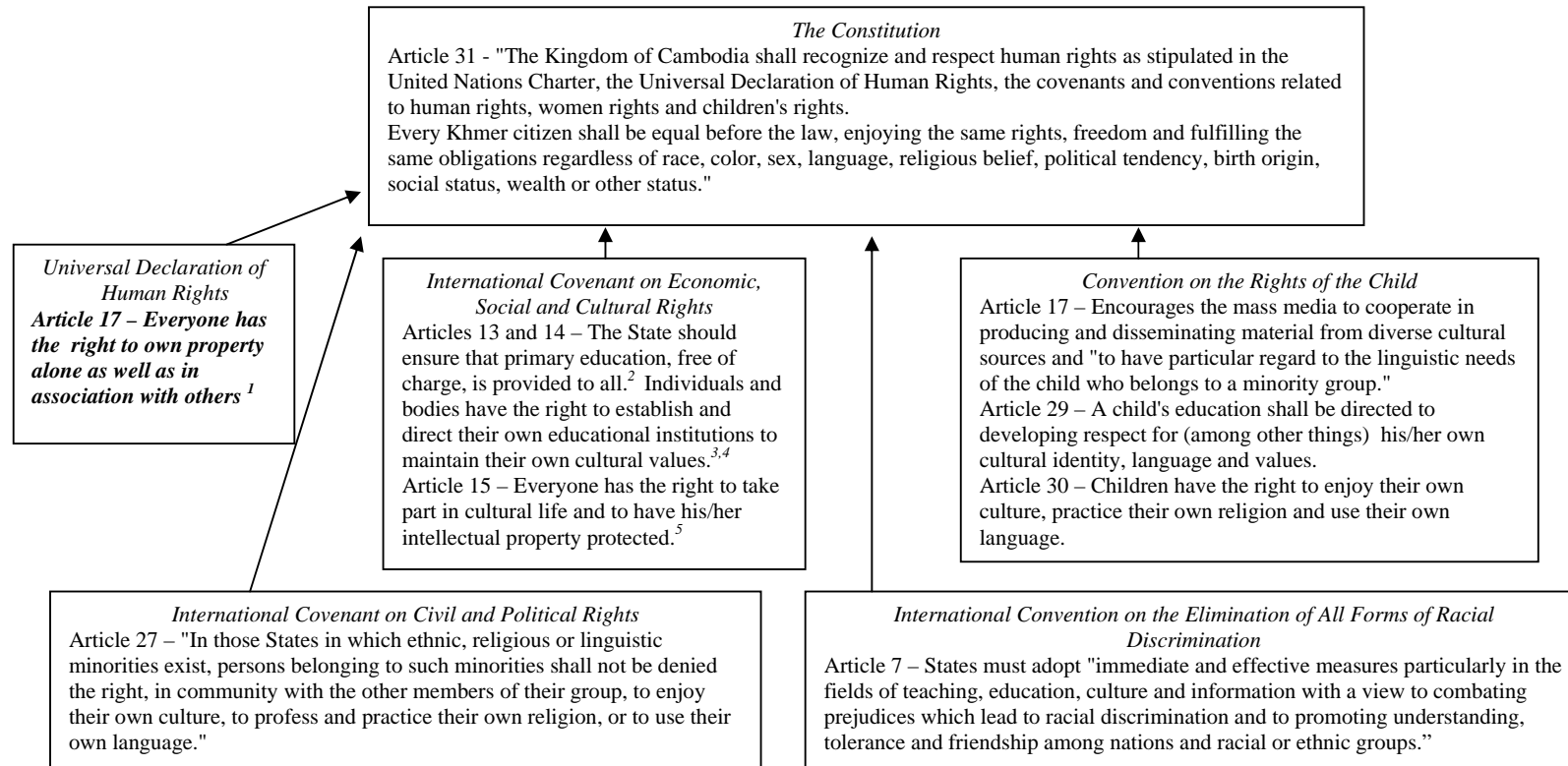
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Annex 1. Rights granted to indigenous peoples in Cambodia by the constitution and international conventions.

All Cambodian laws must comply with the standards included in the international Declarations, Covenants and Conventions below to which Cambodia is signatory, and the Rights guaranteed are incorporated into the Cambodian Constitution.



Notes: 1) The communal (collective) traditional land ownership of indigenous peoples is now protected under the Land Law 2001. Land tenure and access to forest were top priorities identified by indigenous communities through the Highlanders Association Consultation (Ratanakiri, 2002-2003). Access to education and health and cultural preservation were also high priorities. 2) The Covenant obliges each State still lacking universal primary education to create & implement an action plan to ensure a primary level education for all within a reasonable time. 3) The Secretary of State for Education approved five ethnic minority scripts in 2003. 4) Consultations conducted by the Indigenous Communities and Education-Capacity Building Project (Ratanakiri, 2002) reached the consensus that indigenous peoples want their children to be educated in their communities using an approach that enables students to (i) remain in their communities; (ii) contribute to their communities' cultural, social and economic development, and (iii) acquire skills and knowledge necessary for interacting and competing in the wider society. 5) Intellectual property includes indigenous people's local knowledge: e.g. medicinal plants, communal land & forest management, and oral history (Source: McCausland 2003).

Annex 2 Bilingual Initiatives in Ratanakiri

OBJECTIVES Bilingual Education Initiatives	Agency and Respective Focus of Activities		
	ICC (1997)	NTFP (1997)	CARE (2002)
Develop vernacular writing systems	Pioneer		
Conduct advocacy & document processes in order to feed into government policies and planning processes.	NFE Department; Ministerial Committee for Script Approval MOEYS (Pioneer in script development & advocacy; Bilingual NFE programmes and materials)	NFE Department, MOEYS; Ministries of Environment; Land Management; Forestry and Wildlife (Pioneer in bilingual efforts relating to natural resource management)	Inter-Departmental Committee, MOEYS (Pioneer for primary bilingual education programmes: Teacher training, Materials production & Community Schoos)
Document the process in order to feed into government policies and planning processes	Pilot through Dept of NFE (MOEYS) targeting adults and youth	MOEYS' NFE Dept., Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Land Management and Planning key counterparts	Inter-departmental MOEY steering committee; focus on primary grades, formal education system
Local teacher training and material production teams	NFE; ;Community volunteers (Tampuan, Krung, Brao, Kavet)	NFE; Community volunteers (Krung, Kavet)s	Primary level community teachers (Krung, Tampuan)
Recruit & train ethnic minority project staff to be extension workers in their own communities.	NFE trainers & teachers; Project staff for integrated development initiatives	NFE Teachers; Project staff for Natural resources,;Health, Land use-planning, Agriculture extension; Indigenous Youth Project; Highlanders' Association	Teacher Training Team; Community Organisers; Community teachers
Strengthening of Community-Based Organisations	Networking among volunteer teachers	Volunteer Teachers Associations; Natural Resource Committees	Community School Boards
Conduct bilingual education or extension	Integrated rural development including community health, food security, and land use planning	Pioneer in Natural Resources & Land-Use Planning; Community health; Popular Education techniques	Lower Primary Grades-Bilingual Community Schools

Bilingual Curricula Vernacular documentation of cultural and natural resources.	Indigenous Curriculum Committees; Writers' workshops Published literacy primers and supplementary reading materials in four languages	Pioneer in community consultation through Highlands Association; Pioneer in action research and documentation by Indigenous Youth Development Programme	Extensive community consultations for developing "Life Skills" curriculum; "Do-talk-record" Methodology
Provide technical assistance to various government and non-government agencies wishing to develop bilingual initiatives	Bilingual Scripts	Bilingual Extension Content (specializing in community-based natural resource management)	Lessons learned from community schools & teacher training processes

2003 Further Developments: The provincial government effort through Partnership in Local Governance (PLG) funded by bilateral aid is currently preparing bilingual information and extension in basic rights: land, forest, human rights, to be conducted initially through bilingual oral tapes, with possible extension to the written form. This development represents the first Provincial Government initiative to use the vernacular in the history of Ratanakiri province as well as the country. (*Sources: CARE 2002; McClausland 2003; ICC 2002; Paterson 2002*)